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ABSTRACT

This is a report on a research project currently under way. The purpose of the research is to compare some central aspects of goal fulfilment of the 1969 curriculum in two schools of differing organizational and architectural design in the Malmo region, to carry out a detailed analysis of activities in an open plan school, and to develop measurement instruments for the systematic study of different school environments. This project has been planned to operate according to what is termed a problem-solving model, whereby the researchers' activities will above all involve following, describing, and assessing activities at a few schools where all those concerned, the researchers included, are jointly concerned with and responsible for the planning and conduct of activities and their evaluation. This document recounts the activities examined over a two-year period and discusses the evaluation of the activities that will be done, including the development of an evaluation instrument. (Author/IRT)

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November 1975 Current project 1975:20

Title of project: System analysis of local school environments (SLS)

Project no.: 215

In progress at: Department of Educational and Psychological Research, Malmö School of Education

Scientific leader: Ass. Prof. Olof Magne

Project leaders: Deputy Director of Schools Olle Engquist

Experiment leader, Educational Development in the Malmö Region - (EDM = MPU).

Göte Rudvall (Research leader)

Main purposes

To compare some central aspects of goal fulfilment as per the 1969 curriculum in two schools of differing organizational and architectural design in the Malmö region,

to carry out a detailed analysis of activities in an open plan school.

in this connection, to develop measuring instruments for the systematic study of different school environments.

Background

Comprehensive research and development work has been in progress in the Municipality of Malmö since the 1960s. Between 1964 and 1970, this work was undertaken in the Malmö Educational Development Centre (EDC =

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Sw. PUM) and financed with State grants from the National Board of Education to the Malmö Education Authority. Among other things these activities included experiments in educational organization involving collaboration between all school levels. Starting in the school year 1970/71, the National Board of Education awarded the Department of Educational and Psychological Research a special allocation to enable it to take part in municipal educational development work. To provide a managerial framework for these activities, an organization was set up which was similar in character to the Educational Development Centre. This organization was named EDM = Sw. MPU, which is short for "Educational Development in the Malmö Region". Collaboration between the Municipality and the Department within this framework has among other things included a study of activities in open plan schools also known as SAMSKAP schools. SAMSKAP is the abbreviated title of an intermunicipal school building organization launched in 1967 which has established a number of open plan schools in the Malmö region. These open plan schools have been compared with schools of traditional design in a project sponsored by MPU and entitled Curricular Implementation in SAMSKAP Schools (CISS, Sw. LISS). Among other things, this project entailed a two-year comparison of pupil development at the two different types of school. A corresponding study of upper level schools (grades 7-9, ages 14-16) was undertaken in the project Varying Sizes of Groups and Team Teaching (the VGT) project (Sw. VGL), reported in School Research Newsletter 1971:2).

The research so far conducted under the two above mentioned projects concerning open plan schools as compared with schools of traditional design has for the most part been of a general exploratory character. The views of different personnel groups and pupils concerning activities have been inventoried and a study has been made of the cognitive and socio-emotional development of different pupil groups.

The project System Analysis of Local School Environments (the SLS project) has been prompted by the desirability of a closer investigation of certain issues raised by the above mentioned studies. Greater certainty is needed concerning the way in which new schools should be built to make the best possible provision for the greater flexibility which has come to be required in forms of activity and pupil groupings and also for the closer partnership demanded between different personnel categories. Demands for school premises conducive to this type of flexibility have been accentuated following the introduction of the new comprehensive school curriculum, Lgr 69, and again after the reform proposals put forward by the SIA Commission (Inner work of the school). Opinions have been very much divided concerning, among other things, the lengths to which the open plan principle should be taken so as to reconcile considerations of stability and security with the above mentioned need for flexibility and partnership. Therefore one of the purposes of the SLS project is to try to shed further light on the question of how different forms of school organization, activity, resource utilization and layout affect goal achievement in schools.

The design of activities

General planning

Whereas the VGL and LISS projects mainly employed quantitative statistical methods to study activities which the researchers themselves were on the whole unable to influence, the SLS project has been planned to operate according to what is termed a problem solving model, whereby the researchers' activities will above all involve following, describing and assessing activities at a few schools where all those concerned, the researchers themselves included, are jointly concerned with and responsible for the planning and conduct of activities and their evaluation.

The school year 1973/74 was mainly devoted to discussions between all the groups involved, trade union organizations, municipal education authorities etc., in order to establish the basic conditions on which the work of the project was to be conducted. Since the funds allocated were relatively limited in relation to this type of study of the full range of school functions, the activities of the project were mostly confined to middle level. Two schools were selected, one of them an open plan school and the other of traditional design. Both were situated in Malmö and both comprised all three school levels. It was also planned to carry out more limited exploratory studies of a number schools forming a species of reference or control schools.

A project group was set up which, apart from the researchers came to include a representative of the municipal education authority, a representative of the teachers' union and representatives of the following categories at the experimental schools: school management (headmasters and directors of studies), teachers, other personnel and parents. During the spring term of 1974, this project group organized a preliminary inventory of problems at the schools, to which end all personnel and pupils concerned were asked to state their views of their work situation. On the basis of this inventory of problems, certain preliminary planning of activities was undertaken during the school year 1974/75.

The plan of activities and special research measures for the duration of the project can be summarized as follows.

	Activities	Special research measures
Stage 1: (Autumn term 1973)	Definition of overriding principles for the activities of the project. Choice of school level. Limitation of number of schools. Preliminary inventory of problem areas.	Indication of general premises. General inventory of problems. Steps to ensure that all relevant groups are given a hearing.

	Activities	Special research measures
Stage 2: (Spring term 1974)	Principles governing the choice of schools. Selection of schools. Information to schools concerning the purposes of the project. Definition of problem areas and variables for special study. Formation of working and analytical groups for the planning of activities, 1974/75. Commencement of working group training	Listing of results from the LISS and VGL projects which should be taken into account by the present project. Information to schools. Direction and co-ordination of working groups.
Stage 3: (1974/75)	Continued training of working groups. Successive planning of activities and analysis of results. Construction of evaluation instruments. Collection of data concerning process and result variables. Deliberations with schools and various interested groups concerning activities. Planning of activities for the school year 1975/76.	Direction and co-ordination of working groups. Construction and testing of evaluation instruments. Collection of data concerning process and result variables. Information and discussion concerning problems arising in the course of activities.
Stage 4: (1975/76)	Main experiment. Work on alternative designs of activities. Testing and successive revision of evaluation instruments. Concise inventory of results.	= stage 3. Plus the concise collection of data concerning the experiments.
Stage 5: (1976/77)	Data processing and inventory of results with the aid of analytical groups.	Data processing. Presentation of results. Transmission of results to various interested parties.

School activities 1974/75

Work so far has more or less adhered to the plan described above. Activities at the two experimental schools during the school year 1974/75 came to focus on various forms of co-operation between classes and grades for the promotion of the pupils' social development. Separate plans were made for each school, and activities in the two schools developed on very different lines, due among other things to the difference in their layouts.

The open plan school also wanted to try some form of collaboration between junior and middle levels, and a system of twin classes was organized to this end, a junior level class being linked with a middle level class three years older. Thus grade 1 classes were linked with grade 4 classes, and so on. Co-operation between the classes was to be jointly evolved by the teachers and the pupils concerned. The resultant arrangements varied a great deal in scope and design from one pair of classes to another. In some cases the partnership was mainly confined to open air days and excursions, looking at films together, having lunch together and so on. In other cases it also entailed small groups of middle level pupils visiting the junior level to help the younger children with their school work, e.g. reading and mathematics.

As is often the case in other open plan schools, joint lessons were also held with several classes in the same grade, e.g. in different projects or "themes" in general subjects.

Activities in the traditionally planned school were wholly confined to middle level. At the beginning of the autumn term 1974, teachers there carried out a project entitled "Social Contact" which was common to all three grades. In this project the pupils, divided into small groups incorporating different ages, prepared and conducted a large

number of study visits to various public institutions and work places, where they carried out interviews and made observations. Co-operation between pupils of different ages was prepared by means of joint tasks of various kinds at school, in the course of which children from the different grades produced drawings, staged dramatizations and undertook various other activities as well as going on an excursion together. The actual experiment covered a six-week period, most of the activities taking place one day a week. Since the teachers found this experiment very hard work and the pupils did not respond as favourably as been expected, activities during the spring term were confined to more limited partnership situations. In grades 5 and 6 an experimental period of "station systems" was organized in Swedish lessons. Heterogeneous age groups were formed and made to circulate between a number of stations involving activities of different kinds, all aimed at improving the pupils' communicative ability. There were exercises presenting creativity stimuli and exercises involving the practice of linguistic skills. There were also a number of unmanned stations. A similar form of partnership was organized in grade 4 but confined to the two parallel classes.

School activities 1975/76

Activities for 1975/76 have been planned on much the same lines as in 1974/75.

Twin class activities at the open plan school are to be given a scope and direction resembling the activities organized during the previous school year. Particular attention is being devoted, through the medium of a working group, to the school democracy process and the development of the pupils' joint responsibility and joint influence, both directly in connection with teaching and as regards the general school environment. Class committee and pupil committee activities are being tested from grade 2 onwards, and various forms of co-operation are practised in the teaching context.

During the periods allotted for freely chosen work, senior level pupils can visit the junior and medium levels and take part in teaching activities in classes where teachers are interested in this type of assistance. In the traditionally designed school, joint ventures between different grades are expected to occur on a smaller scale than during last school year. The experiments made previously were found cumbersome and did not correspond to the work input required. Partnership between parallel classes has been judged the most natural form of co-operation as far as contacts outside the individual class are concerned. Joint tasks for pupils from different grades are only planned insofar as this type of arrangement is spontaneously prompted by practical circumstances, e.g. traffic education, the celebration of certain festivals, joint activities on open air days. All middle level teachers meet regularly (every fortnight or three weeks) to plan partnership situations and discuss problems of mutual interest. In grade 6 there is a certain interchange of lessons between teachers of two parallel classes, the principle being for each of them to assume charge of a particular group of subjects in both classes.

Evaluation of activities

The study of school activities included by the project serves a dual purpose. Firstly an analysis is being undertaken of the general functioning of middle level classes in each school. In this connection, particular attention is being devoted to the interaction process and its problems (co-operation between school management and teachers, between teachers themselves, between teachers and other personnel, between teachers and pupils, and between pupils themselves) in different organizational and "accommodational" conditions. Secondly, a more detailed study is being made of special experimental activities planned in joint consultation between all those concerned and described in the previous section of this report.

The attitudes of different groups to school activities in general and the experimental activities in particular were inventoried during the school year 1974/75 in a variety of ways. The project personnel participated in activities and followed them by means of observations of various kinds. Interviews concerning the partnership situation and experience of the experimental activities were conducted together with all teachers as well as school management and certain other personnel categories. The pupils were asked via questionnaires to state their views concerning activities generally and concerning the special experiments. A similar questionnaire was completed by the parents of middle level pupils.

The project personnel are expected to participate in and investigate school activities during 1975/76 on much the same lines as last school year. The intention is for the personal presence of the project personnel in the schools to be stepped up during the final year of the experiment.

One of the important tasks of the project personnel is to provide feedback to those working in the schools. The results of questionnaire studies and other obeservations have therefore been communicated to the personnel at the schools by word of mouth and in writing, and the teachers have been asked to pass the questionnaire study findings on to the pupils and their parents.

One of the special tasks of the project is to <u>devise simple analytical instruments</u> which any school will be able to use as a basis on which to discuss the design of its internal work, the point being that greater opportunities of decentralized decision making will increase the possibilities of varying local organization. In constructing these evaluation instruments, particular attention is being devoted to the way in which teaching collaboration is organized and the extent to which working methods and groupings occur which make it easier for consideration to be shown for the needs

of different pupil groups and which stimulate the joint responsibility of the pupils for their instruction and for the shaping of their school environment.

Work on evaluation instruments of this kind, e.g. in questionnaire form, is being conducted as part of the project with the assistance of a specially engaged expert, a middle level teacher in Malmö.

The plan is to have the situation in a number of other middle level schools in Malmö and in some other locality charted in connection with the testing of these questionnaires. In this way, activities will be inventoried at two open plan schools and at two traditionally designed schools not having the same close contacts with researchers as the two experimental schools, so as to shed light on the idiosyncracies of the experimental schools and on the manner in which activities have been influenced by their participation in the project.

Apart from the activities themselves, interest within the project has also focussed on what is termed the meta-process, i.e. the attitude taken by the various persons involved to questions of partnership and to the different proposals which have emerged as work has proceeded concerning closer co-operation with a view to the better achievement of the goals of the school system. Those who have been most involved in planning have been asked on repeated occasions, apart from submitting reports mainly concerned with the teaching process, to state their views concerning activities under the project and the partnership problems connected with them. The aim of this technique has been to shed light on different problems connected with innovation ventures in differently designed schools.

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Address:

Pedagogiska-psykologiska institutionen
Lärarhögskolan
Fack
S-200 45 MALMÖ 23